

Pentecost 12, August 15, 2021 (Jo 6:51-58; Prov 9:1-6; Ps 34:9-14; Eph 5:15-20)

Two thousand years ago in Rome, there were some strange rumors going around: *Did you hear about those people down in Jerusalem? They call themselves “Christ-ians.” They drown their babies, and they’re cannibals—every time they get together, they eat someone’s flesh! They must be barbarians!*

Rumors like this were being spread in Rome within years of Jesus’ death and resurrection. Some aspects of our Christian faith have always been difficult to understand.

The sacraments of baptism and communion remain mysteries even to those of us who’ve attended seminary and served as pastors. How can we *die and be reborn* in baptism? How can we *eat the flesh and drink the blood* of a man—even a **God**-man—who lived and died 2000 years ago?

Go back 2000 years to the lifetime of Jesus. He was a Jew. He grew up with the Jewish laws, commandments, statutes, and ordinances—all 613 of them.

One of the most important laws was, don’t eat flesh with the blood in it. That’s one of only four laws considered important enough to be repeated in the New Testament Book of Acts (15:28-9).

Can you imagine how offended, how *grossed out*, the followers of Jesus must have felt when he began talking like this? It went against everything they’d ever learned about living a faithful life as the chosen people of God!

But Jesus commanded it: **I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world. . . Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. [Eat This Bread, WoV 709, ELW 472]**

It’s no wonder the Jews were arguing among themselves! On the surface it seemed Jesus was demanding something impossible. But beyond that, it was *sacrilegious*. It couldn’t—and *shouldn’t*—be done.

But here's the catch. From the beginning of the early Christian Church—before the time when Ephesians was written—this new faith was different from everything that had gone before it. It was completely, totally *countercultural*. Against every idea of *normal*.

That's why the writer of Ephesians wrote what he did: **Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise. . . . Don't be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. Don't get drunk on wine—that leads to more foolishness. Instead, be filled with the Spirit. . . . Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.**

The wisdom of God appears foolish to human beings; but in the end it's what the *world* calls *wise* that turns out to be foolish. **God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom**, wrote St. Paul (I Corinthians 1:25).

What are you seeking in this life? We're blessed, here in Edgar. While huge parts of the world suffer continual drought, or flood, or fire, or volcanic eruption, along with famine, many of us in the United States are thriving. Our bellies, at least, are filled.

But deep down in the hungry places of your heart, what are you missing? Deep inside, where the newest high-tech device and 150 Facebook friends can't reach, what's lacking in your life? Deep inside your hungry soul, where all the education, or a new car, or new clothes can't touch the emptiness, what do you really need? Deep inside your shame and pain, where the alcohol or the drugs can no longer offer escape, what are you really craving? **[Eat This Bread, WoV 709; ELW 472]**

So we have to look again at today's gospel to try to understand what Jesus meant. **Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day. For my flesh is real food, and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them. . . . The one who feeds on me will live because of me. . . . Your ancestors ate manna and died, but whoever feeds on this bread will live forever.**

How much of himself did Jesus give? All. Everything. Flesh and blood. Body and soul. Life and death. The birth of Jesus, of God-in-the-flesh, is the *in-carnation*; *carn-* means *flesh*. The birth of Jesus is the *enfleshing*, the taking on of human flesh, by God himself.

When our holy God became *flesh and blood*, he opened the door for all humankind to become *divine*. Jesus took on our flesh so he could take up our sins, so he could raise us up at the last day.

Our Lutheran understanding of the sacraments is very earthy, very basic, almost crude. Jesus commanded us to use things of the earth—water, bread, and wine—in ways that would open our hearts and minds to him. **[Eat This Bread, WoV 709; ELW 472]**

He wants to have us *completely*. He wants all of us, and he wants us to have *all of him*: body and soul, flesh and blood. He wants to be totally intimate with us, to actually become a part of us.

When you eat the flesh and drink the blood of Jesus, *he* becomes a part of your body, giving strength to your mind and spirit, but also becoming, for a while, a part of your earlobe or toenail.

Remember the reading from Ephesians? **Be careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise . . . Do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is . . . Be filled with the Spirit . . .**

When you have the body of Christ literally within you, be careful how you walk! Don’t take Jesus’ flesh and blood into places you wouldn’t want Jesus to find you!

Remember these words from Martin Luther: **when you feel *unworthy* to receive the Lord’s Supper, that’s when you should *run*, not walk, to the altar, to throw yourself on his infinite mercy.**

The less worthy you feel, the more ready you are for the healing power of this intimate physical presence of Jesus to give you peace, comfort, and strength.

And finally, consider the miracle God is working. He can take ordinary bread and wine, plain old human chewing and swallowing, and bring salvation out of them: salvation in *this* life, and in the *next*.

In the same way God can take you and me—plain old human beings in bondage to sin—and use *us* to bring Christ to a world so desperately in need of salvation. Jesus is *our* bread so we can be bread to *others*. [***Eat This Bread, WoV 709; ELW 472***]

So after we've confessed our faith and prayed, come to the Supper! Come and receive what you already are: the body of Christ!

Thanks be to God!